Reprieve to Breathe

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Reprieve to Breathe

by On_a_Happier_Note

Summary

Through the targeting of the Survey Corps, for their whole branch to become wanted criminals, he'd slipped back into his hypervigilant mindset from his days on the streets of the underground. He was expecting a backstab at any moment and was prepared to be the one to strike the first blow. Waiting around and being the innocent party made you the dead party.

Notes

Set the night after the defeat of Rod Reiss' titan. From my understanding, they pulled an all-nighter, killed the thing, then were stuck sorting stuff out then crashed :)

See the end of the work for more notes

Staring up at the ceiling in bed, his comrades safe and asleep in the adjacent rooms, Levi couldn't seem to fall asleep.

For a seasoned veteran of the Survey Corps, a branch of the military where one encountered more deaths, unspeakable horrors and traumatic surprises than should be humanly tolerable, Levi usually slept fine. He didn't sleep as much as many other soldiers, but he slept soundly nonetheless. Maybe it was due to becoming accustomed to such atrocities around him, or the confidence that he could deal with any threat coming his way. Or maybe it was the hardening of his heart to the plight of others which he always strove to stave against.

However, recent occurrences truly shook up his usual calm and controlled demeanour as normally reliable and safe elements of their deployment became as dangerous and unpredictable as the rest of it. They hadn't been safe within the walls, couldn't trust their comrades, couldn't fight a righteous battle, and couldn't even expect to live and fight another day. Even the most steadfast parts of his life, Commander Erwin's leadership and the existence of the Survey Corps, were under fire and close to ending entirely.

Through the targeting of the Survey Corps, for their whole branch to become wanted criminals, he'd slipped back into his hypervigilant mindset from his days on the streets of the underground. He was expecting a backstab at any moment and was prepared to be the one to strike the first blow. Waiting around and being the innocent party made you the dead party.

With the amount of betrayal, fighting, torture, kidnapping and killing in the past week, even though they appeared to be in the clear, Levi didn't feel things could go back to normal so easily.

Give it time, it'll all fall apart soon, nothing can be relied on to stay the same and everything will be turned on its head in no time.

Attempting to ignore these troubling thoughts, he finally fell into an uneasy sleep.

After all he'd been through recently, standing in front of Captain Levi's door should not make him this nervous. Official scroll in hand, he stood in the hallway boring holes into the door with his eyes. This late at night, Levi was most likely asleep, but he had been given a job to do. It wasn't that Levi scared him, not *anymore*, it was more that Levi was in charge of him and above all else, he did value how Levi thought of him. Their relationship started off rocky, with a beatdown, promise of kill him and the countless deaths around them. After all that, and getting to know Humanity's Strongest as a person, it only cemented how much Eren wanted Levi to respect him.

He rapped on the door, and receiving no response, braced himself before entering his superior officer's room. Sure, the group's relationship and chain of command had changed dramatically recently, but it still felt weird treating *the* Captain Levi on a somewhat more equal footing to other members of the squad.

"Captain?" Eren called hesitantly.

Levi was usually an early riser, even by military standards. He often woke him and his other squad mates up so this was the first time seeing him sleep. It felt oddly intrusive but they'd been given this errand and needed to deliver the message immediately so there was no helping it.

“Captain Levi sir-“

Before Eren could register it, the sleeping man was gone, he’d whirled away faster than he could follow and came to a stop right in front of him.

Levi woke with a shock, one hand gripped tightly onto the intruder’s shoulder, the other stabbing them in the chest with his concealed blade. Whatever they’d been holding dropped from their grasp and rolled away.

Finally sparing a glance at who his victim was, ice went down his spine and he stood frozen.

Eren.

His charge stared at him with wide, surprised eyes, appearing just as shocked as Levi did. As quickly as the tension built above their heads, it burst, Levi withdrew his weapon and cast it aside as the soldier he'd gored collapsed to the ground.

A quick stab and twist between the ribs with a narrow and sharp blade, just as he’d been taught. A thrusting blow like this would puncture a lung and perforate other organs, causing a person to quickly bleed out internally in agony. And he’d just performed it on his trusting subordinate.

Steam and blood spurted rapidly from the wound until his body broke out of its stupor to seal the wound. However, the internal damage had already been done.

“Eren. Eren what-“ Levi knelt down beside him and propped him up against the bed. Ripping off Eren’s soiled shirt and removing his jacket, other than a torso smeared with red there was nothing for him to treat.

Though the boy gurgled, coughing and spitting out blood as his lungs failed to inflate properly.

“Shit shit shit! Can I get first aid in here?!” he barked, triggering sounds of fast footfalls from the surrounding rooms.

“Capt’n,” Eren wheezed, rib cage spasming with twinging, hitched breaths. He gazed dazedly at Levi, the scarlet staining his face in contrast to his pale, clammy skin. In his light-headed confusion, Eren was still trying to get up to approach Levi for whatever reason but he wasn’t having any of it.

“Stay down,” he commanded, his tone betrayed by a slight waver, “Just stay still and *stay down*.” Eren at least responded to that and sunk back down, focussing on trying to get air and stay conscious.

Armin came rushing in with the first aid bag and skidded down on his knees next to Levi on the ground, quickly opening and unrolling the supplies.

“Sir, what happened?”

“The wound has healed but there’s a concerning level of bleeding before hopefully his organs fixed themselves. The top priority now is his lung. His right one was pierced and although it’s healed, it can’t seem to expand properly.”

Seeing Eren’s shivering, Levi grabbed the sheet off the bed and nestled him loosely within it while Armin elevated his legs onto the bed to keep his blood flow up. Even for a titan-shifter, the amount of blood on the floor was alarming.

Unsure how to help, his other squad mates, awoken by the chaos, started hovering in the doorway.

“Captain, what’s the situation?” Mikasa asked, scanning for threats, and finding none, her focus settled on Eren and figuring out what happened and how to help.

“Situation’s under control; keep your distance in case shit escalates. Bring us hot water and towels to clean him up and otherwise stand ready for a possible incident.”

“But Sir-“

“That’s an order Ackerman. Your friend will be fine one way or another.” With that, Mikasa and the other team members left to gather supplies. Armin had cleared out the encrusted blood around Eren’s nose to help with breathing but was at a loss as to how to solve the problem. While disorientated from the shock, and dizzy from lack of air, Eren gained some degree more coherency and had a hazy idea come to mind. And in his state, he didn’t have the lucidity to really worry about or question it.

“N-needle…” Eren stuttered hoarsely, and Levi handed it to him hesitantly before turning back to the medical bag to get the multiple dose vials that went with it. He knew little about medicine besides battlefield first aid and rarely saw conditions such as this treated as he rarely visited medical.

“I’m not sure these will help,” he explained as he placed the vials beside Eren, “But we have a sedative or pain relieving-“ He went silent as he saw the teen push the syringe plunger all the way down before stabbing it into his chest then pulling the plunger out entirely. A burst of air escaped as he tried to breathe in as deeply as possible. Removing the needle, he just laid there on the ground gasping for breath.

The others, back from their errand, stood silently around the scene both confused and astonished by all that occurred in the last few minutes. Armin took the towels and water and set about cleaning his friend whose breathing finally deepened and stabilised. Jean was the first to voice the group’s sentiments.

“Eren, not that I'm mad but, how the *hell* did you know to do that?”

“My father was a doctor;” he started, voice scratchy, before taking some offered water to rinse his mouth and drink. “I’ve seen him do similar for someone else with a punctured lung. He did it a bit differently though,” he winced, sharp stabbing pains still triggered by his inhales. Mikasa entered the room and cocooned Eren in the sheet, with no complaint from the cold and shaky teen.

“I don't think your father was his own patient either,” she replied, sitting beside him on the floor while trying to avoid the patches of blood. Now able to focus on the others in the room, Eren noticed his whole squad, Armin, Mikasa, Jean, Connie, Sasha, and Squad Leaders Levi and Hange. Normally he would be embarrassed or nervous about the attention, but his head was still muddled so he stared blankly back at them, hoping they would do the talking. Mikasa must have seen this and went ahead asking questions she wanted answered. “Now that’s all out of the way, what caused all this? Was Eren accidentally injured or attacked on watch?”

“No, I stabbed him,” Levi answered in an even tone. Everyone’s expression fell along a spectrum of shock, outrage, confusion and for Hange, curiosity. Halting their obvious questions, he pressed on. ”And no, Eren wasn’t out of control. I was.” While having grown much respect for Levi over recent events with the uprising and their survival, Mikasa’s stare became jagged obsidian, but meeting Levi’s eyes tempered her gaze. His usually unfeeling and hardened look was replaced with a somewhat guilty one.

“It’s okay, it was an accident. I’m fine now.” Eren tried to placate her. Furrowed brows showed Levi’s disagreement that if they recover, stabbing someone is okay. He found some sad hilarity in Eren defending the person who harmed him from someone rightfully angry. It felt like an inversion of the events of Eren’s ‘teaspoon incident’.

“This is *not* fine. You’re injured! You could’ve died!” she argued back. While the others were lost watching the alternating arguing, Hange just wanted to understand the source of the issue.

“We still haven’t answered what caused all this. Levi, Eren, if you could explain please?” Thinking back to what started this Levi looked to Eren with a raised brow; what was he doing in his room?

“Well, with all the action of recent events, I was having trouble sleeping,” Eren started. For anyone who knew him, this translated to traumatic truth reveals were keeping him up. With two titan transformations in a day and his recent captivity, he should’ve been dead to the world. “So I kept watch out the front of our barrack wing, I know we’re not wanted criminals now, but it gave me something to do. Then a garrison soldier came up to me carrying an urgent message for our squad leaders to meet with the commanders, Historia and other noblemen to discuss ongoing government issues.” Eren still didn’t understand too much of what happened in the last few days, which was understandable with the levels of chaos and corruption at hand, but he did understand the urgency of getting all of this sorted out.

“I went to Levi’s room to deliver the message, I knocked then entered and things went so fast I think both of us only registered what happened after I’d been stabbed and collapsed.”

Their collective gaze settled on Levi.

“It hasn’t really set in that we’re safe yet. Or at least not in as much danger as earlier for the time being. I wasn’t awake yet and with recent events and what I perceived as an attacker in my room, fight response just kicked in before thought.”

Levi watched the group’s reactions ranging from disturbed to concerned to even pitying. Above all else, he didn’t expect the undertone of understanding in their expressions, nor did he think he deserved it.

Then, reading the room like a tone-deaf toddler, Hange pushed Levi aside with a playful poke to the chest – the other glaring at them – and strode over to where Armin was now positioning Eren on a chair.

“Now with that all sorted out, Eren, how are you feeling? Does it still hurt? Did you feel you were going to transform at any point?” Because Eren knew Hange actually did care, in their own way, he tried not to feel too annoyed by their numerous questions.

“I’m fine, my lungs and side are still sore and I’m tired, but I’ll be able to sleep this off. And after the initial shock and injury, I was able to hold off transforming; there was no threat or clear goal to trigger it.” Honestly, Eren hadn’t once considered transforming during the run-in. Sure, he was injured pretty badly, but without the feeling of there being an active threat or danger around, and only Levi there trying to fix things, no need to fight arose.

“That’s great then! Well, not the injured part,” they gushed at Eren’s unimpressed look, “But the control you’re getting of your transformation! Even these last few days you’ve shown massive improvement.” Hange paused for a moment contemplatively. “This is quite the interesting case where your regeneration surprisingly worked against you. Blood pooled internally and since the incision site closed, the air that escaped your lung formed a pocket which hindered lung expansion.”

“I just focussed on getting the air out of my chest.” Although he did pay attention to his father’s complex procedures and Hange’s detailed scientific rants, he liked to keep things simple in practice. “Maybe one day I’ll be able to control when and how I heal.” *Like what Reiner did*, he thought bitterly.

“True true, I look forward to testing that out. And this might seem odd coming from me, but we should all call it a night and figure things out tomorrow.” They bent down and grabbed the scroll Eren brought into the room. “I’ll look into this, the rest of you back to sleep.” With that they walked off, the others with further confirmation Eren was okay followed behind, leaving Eren, Armin, Mikasa and Levi in the room.

Armin finished packing up the first aid kit and gathering up the towels and buckets used, planning to sort and clean them tomorrow. Mikasa hung around to offer to carry Eren to his bunk which Levi agreed to before Eren could even object. As they all prepared to leave, Eren turned back to address Levi.

“I’m just glad it was me and not anyone else delivering the message.” Eren tried saying light-heartedly, but the genuine sincerity of his statement won out.

“Hardly, the rest of your insane friends don’t actually have a death wish and know to keep their distance.” Even saying that, Levi dreaded the thought of if it was someone else.

“But Sir, the message was urgent!” Levi tsked at that. *This kid.*

“Regardless of its urgency, it's not worth the risk to your health,” *Hey that sounded pretty caring of him,* Eren thought- “And you got bloodstains all over the damn floor.” *Nevermind*.

“Get some rest Eren. I’ll deal with all of you in the morning.” With that, he closed the door in the faces of the three lightly smiling at him. Listening as their light footsteps fading away, he looked to the mess on his floor and uncharacteristically ignored it for going back to bed. He would deal with it all in the morning and he meant it. He didn’t have to worry about there being a next morning, or if they’d all make it to the next day or week for a while.

He dared to hope that things would return to normal, or at least a normal for the Survey Corps. That he could be stuck with this mishappen group of human disasters for a while longer. He’d do his best to keep it that way.

For now, eyes closed and drifting off to sleep, they had a reprieve to breathe.

End Notes

Inspired from that scene from X-men (2000), where Wolverine accidentally stabs Rogue upon waking from a nightmare.
(Also comments make me very happy).

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